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Wednesday 7 December 2005

Mercredi 7 décembre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

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L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 7 December 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 7 décembre 2005

The House met at 1845.

VISITOR

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think we all in the House would like to recognize the third Unionville scout troop joining us this evening. We welcome you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, that's not a point of order, but we certainly welcome them this evening.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 37, An Act to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 in relation to municipalities, when Bill 37 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may then be immediately called; and

That, when the order for third reading is called, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That there shall be no deferral of any vote allowed pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The deputy government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 51.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I know that the good scouts are here to learn a little bit about parliamentary procedure, and this is what's called, in the parlance of the standing orders, a time allocation motion. It directs the House how to proceed with certain business and certain bills. I know that the scouts and the people who are watching and listening in on the proceedings here tonight will want to understand some of the history and context of time

allocation, some of the ways things work in this House, both past and present.

I know that you're going to hear in debate from members opposite some of the concerns that both parties will have about the use of time allocation. So before I begin my remarks about the motion itself as it relates to Bill 37, I want to put a few factual items on the record so you will understand the context for the comments you're about to hear.

I want to say at the very outset that our government has opened up bills, motions and proceedings in this House for more full debate in this Legislature, unlike other governments in the past. We do not take time allocation lightly. In fact, after eight years of having legislation literally forced down the throats of all members of this House, we've changed the atmosphere around this place. We've introduced 77 government bills; 55 bills have passed, and this is only the 10th time that the government has been forced to use time allocation in order to move a bill forward. That amounts to about 8% of our bills. I want to indicate, especially to my colleagues in the official opposition, the Tories—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It is a bit higher, isn't it? My math is wrong; it's actually about 14%.

When the Conservatives were in government, they allocated over 50% of the bills that they introduced using time allocation. Let me be very clear that this House will never be treated with the kind of disrespect that was seen under the Harris and Eves Tory governments. In fact, time allocation began with our colleagues in the third party, the NDP. They set the trend. In fact, the concept of time allocation was introduced by then House leaders Shelley Martel and David Cooke and passed in this House. The NDP set the trend for the use of time allocation motions. The NDP used time allocation five times more than the previous Liberal government.

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In fact, I can tell you that when the social contract legislation was introduced, there were no public hearings allowed by the New Democrats. There was no time allotted for third reading debate. There were no public hearings when the NDP introduced gas tax increases of 3.4 cents a litre. So you're going to hear some things from both opposition parties, no doubt, but I want to put very clearly on the record a very distinct and important difference between the way both parties have treated and addressed this Legislature and the use of time allocation.

I did indicate the use of time allocation of this kind of motion by the official opposition, by the Harris-Eves

Tories. In fact, 83% of bills that received royal assent used a time allocation motion: 67 of 110 bills during the Harris-Eves years, from 1999 to 2003. In the eight years the Tories used time allocation, we never had more than three days of second reading debate on a budget bill. I'm going to find it very rich to hear the howls of protest and outrage that are no doubt going to come from the opposition benches, given some of the history.

But I did want to reserve some of my comments tonight for the actual bill that is the subject of the time allocation motion, and that's Bill 37. Bill 37 is an act that shows respect for municipalities. It's quite a stark contrast—and I understand that the official opposition may not want to support this bill. They have very much a different view of the relationship between the provincial government and municipalities. We saw eight years of downloading. We saw eight years of imposition. We saw eight years of command and control.

We have very much a different kind of relationship and respect for our municipal leaders like Mayor David Miller here in the city of Toronto or Mayor Hazel McCallion in Mississauga or Mayor Dave Courtemanche in Sudbury or Mike Hancock in Brantford, I say to my colleagues from Sudbury and Brantford. We have established quite a different relationship with those municipal leaders. If this bill passes, and I believe it is very important that it pass, it would exempt bills that give municipalities new revenue tools, which they've been calling for, from the requirements to hold a referendum under the Taxpayer Protection Act passed and imposed on municipalities by the previous government.

I was there in the summer of 2003 when the Association of Municipalities of Ontario held their annual general meeting here in the city of Toronto. I was there when then Municipal Affairs Minister David Young, Premier Eves and many members of cabinet were in what is called a bear-pit session. Municipality after municipality, led by the very able and very forceful mayor of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion, said very clearly and very distinctly, "The kind of imposition and burden that you are putting on municipalities with this kind of legislative yoke is overbearing and unfair, and shows a fundamental disrespect for the accountability that municipal leaders have."

I remember that the very next day then opposition leader Dalton McGuinty was in that very same forum, talking and listening to municipal leaders. He said very clearly, "We disagree with the Harris-Eves Tories. We disagree with the fundamental disrespect."

I say goodbye to the Scouts from Unionville. Welcome, and thank you for coming to our Legislature tonight.

Dalton McGuinty said, "We disagree with the way the Tories behave and what they believe and the way they have treated with disrespect municipal leaders from across this province." He said very clearly that we would not impose referendum measures because we believe municipal leaders are responsible and accountable to their citizens and constituents. That has been proven time and time again.

There are others who back this view. One happens to be, in fact, one John Tory. This is what he had to say, and I want to read this into the record: "We have to re-examine completely the relationship between the municipal and provincial government to give city governments more latitude to raise some of their own revenue if they choose to do so. They will then be accountable for whatever they choose to do to fund some things that may be priorities for their city. Right now they have to go and ask for permission to do everything, and I don't think that's right."

That's John Tory then. Let's see what the Tories do and how they vote and if they've changed their ways from the disrespect they've shown our municipal leaders. I agree with that John Tory, but as we've discovered with Mr. Tory, he is everything and nothing; he's all over the map; he's everybody's favourite yes-man.

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): Tory story.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: As my colleague says, "It's just a Tory story." So we'll have to find out if my colleagues across the way follow the views of this John Tory or perhaps another John Tory.

I also agree with our municipal leaders at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, who on November 28 said in a press release—I also want to quote them—"The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) welcomes today's introduction of the respect for municipal government act, a bill that would amend the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, and promote the principle that municipal government should be empowered to govern effectively."

That is precisely what Bill 37 does. This Legislature tonight, by supporting this time allocation motion, would say very clearly to those municipal leaders, "We believe you should move forward. We believe that respect should be shown for municipal leaders in the fact that they are accountable to their constituents to make revenue and expenditure decisions, that those folks who are close to the ground are not only capable, but they are legally entitled and empowered to be able to do that." The speedy passage of this legislation would empower those responsible, self-reliant and accountable municipal officials to do so.

I hope I've convinced my colleagues here tonight to support this motion. It is badly needed. It is a rare occurrence in this House to introduce and pass a time allocation motion. I want to assure all members of the House that we will not fall back into the disrespectful way of passing business, choking off debate in this House, but this is necessary. It needs to move forward today.

Speaker, I want to thank you and all members for listening very attentively to my comments tonight.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I am pleased to participate in this debate—in one sense, I am; in another sense, I really find it quite offensive that the minister would rise and, in his introductory remarks, give a defence of why he feels compelled to bring this motion forward.

I'm going to put it in the context of reality. The reason we have the motion before us today is because this government has chosen to shut down debate on this bill. I recall very well the number of times that the member opposite and his colleagues, when we brought forward these motions, railed against the government of the day, of which I was proud to be a part, because at least we, when we were the government, did what we said we would do. Herein is the big difference, because what we have here is a government under one Dalton McGuinty who, while he was trolling for votes across the province of Ontario during an election campaign some two years ago, made a series of 231 promises to the people of Ontario, and he has broken virtually every one of them.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): That's not true.

Mr. Klees: The member for St. Catharines sits in his seat and says, "That's not true." Well, I say to the Minister of Tourism, he may not think it's true but the people across the province of Ontario know it's true. All we have to do is talk to the various segments of people in this province who heard Mr. McGuinty's promises and are experiencing the breaking of those promises.

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Now, tonight, we have the minister responsible for infrastructure stand in his place and introduce a motion that effectively shuts down debate on a piece of legislation that deserves comprehensive debate. While on the one hand its title talks about respect for municipalities, what it does not have is respect for the legislation that exists in the province and respect for taxpayers. What this bill does is amend the Taxpayer Protection Act which, you will recall when the previous government brought it forward, was applauded by people from all parties.

It was the Taxpayer Protection Act that Premier Dalton McGuinty, in the middle of the election campaign, under great applause, made a public presentation of putting his signature to and he committed that he would keep the commitments of that act. It didn't take him long—I say to the table, be sure you get this quote right—after he was Premier to break the very act that he put his signature to, and that was that he would not raise taxes without a referendum, and he did, although he tried to call it something else; he tried to call it a premium. You'll recall that. He wanted to call it a health premium, not a tax. So today we've got a billion and a half more dollars being paid in taxes by seniors, by young people—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's \$2.5 billion.

Mr. Klees: It's \$2.5 billion in total when it's fully implemented, in fact—by the people who can least afford to pay taxes. They're paying those taxes because this Premier chose to break the Taxpayer Protection Act to which he put his signature under great show while he was seeking election. Now this same government, under this same Premier, brings into this Legislature a piece of legislation that says, "We're going to amend that." Do you know why he needs to amend it? Because in Bill 37,

what he wants to do is give municipalities the ability to increase taxes even further.

Interjection: Ugh.

Mr. Klees: Precisely. In case the chief government whip doesn't realize that that's what this legislation is all about, we will remind him that it is exactly what this does.

Let us say to the people of Ontario, be aware that while this government speaks the words "respect for municipalities," what they're not telling you is that it's a great deal of disrespect for taxpayers. Effectively what is happening is that it gives carte blanche to another level of government to lay on additional layers of taxes and fees, and without this legislation, before that happened, there would have had to be a referendum.

Here's the context of this legislation. The previous government, of which I was proud to be a part, believed that before you increased taxes you should be required to go back to the people of the province and ask their permission. After all, it's their tax dollars, their hard-earned money. Before you increase taxes, we believed—and I say that in the past tense because this government clearly doesn't—you have to—

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): You don't believe in it any more?

Mr. Klees: We still believe it. We believed it in the past. That's why we introduced the legislation that said that before you increase taxes, you must go to the people with a referendum. Now this government says, "No, that's not appropriate. We're going to increase taxes, notwithstanding that legislation, and by the way, we're going to make it easier for ourselves now. We're going to exclude ourselves, by legislation, from that requirement."

As the official opposition, we have a responsibility, even if the current government doesn't. We're going to demonstrate that responsibility and obligation to the taxpayers of this province by showing strong opposition to this legislation in this place and we won't let it pass simply. That's why the government is now saying, "Wait a minute, we've had enough debate. We don't want to hear any more of this truth. What we want to do now is put the blanket of silence over this place so that you can no longer debate these issues." But we're saying, "Well, in the final moments that we have available to us, we are going to at least remind people of what this government is doing to them."

Earlier today we had an opportunity to meet with representatives from a number of sectors in the province. They refer to themselves as the JOBS Coalition. There were representatives there from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Urban Development Institute and the chambers of commerce. There were a number of—

Interjection.

Mr. Klees: Well, it's interesting. It's interesting because I hear members of the government carping and making light of the group, yet they were there. They ate their food, they drank their wine and now they're making light of the presentation they made. It's one thing—

Interjection.

Mr. Klees: I just say to you, let's not be two-faced about this. These are hard-working Ontarians who took the time to come here to make their case with you. In case some of you didn't listen, and I know a number weren't there, I'm going to take this opportunity to put on the record in Hansard what we were told by these people, who represent 80% of all businesses in Ontario—small businesses that employ five people and less. For those watching, the reality is that 80% of all businesses in Ontario are small businesses. They are not the multi-nationals. These were the people who came to Queen's Park today to appeal to this government to have a sober second look before they rammed this legislation through and before they put in place and entrenched legislation in this province that they will regret having implemented.

I'm going to quote what Judith Andrew, who is with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said in her presentation because I think it is succinct and makes a very important point:

"The joint Ontario-City of Toronto task force ... final report contains little analysis supporting its recommendation to grant the municipality broad, permissive powers to raise revenue and to regulate. JOBS believes that if the JTF ideas are implemented in a new City of Toronto Act, they will hurt rather than help Toronto by making the city a poor choice to conduct business competitively. Regrettably, the JTF did not investigate—much less quantify—what JOBS believes is the real issue, the claim that the city of Toronto needs additional revenue to carry out its responsibilities.

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"The JOBS Coalition supports the building of fiscally healthy municipalities. At the same time, we hold that an increment in the total tax burden should not be required." I agree with that, and I believe that every member of the opposition agrees with that as well. People are taxed to the hilt. There is no more left for people to give. She goes on to say, "All levels of government should operate within the existing total tax envelope, and not increase the total burden of taxes, fees and charges to Ontario taxpayers...."

"In lieu of 'permissive' legislation and an ensuing medley of powers to raise revenues and regulate (that will be costly to administer for the city and aggravating and difficult for citizens and businesses) we ask policy-makers to take the time to deal forthrightly with Toronto's municipal finance problems."

The point she makes, and the point of this organization of business people representing various sectors of business in this province and across the GTA and within the city of Toronto, is that rather than simply going back to the taps and squeezing more tax dollars out of hard-working Ontarians and businesses, focus government, whether it be the provincial government, the municipal government or the federal government, the leaders of government, on being more responsible, more efficient, and use your dollars wisely and well. That, I believe, is sound advice to this government and to this Legislature.

I continue the quote: "First, do the analysis and make public an official declaration of the city's unmet fiscal needs that is endorsed by both the city and the province. Then, look at realignment of responsibilities, arranged so that each level is responsible for legislation and regulation in separate spheres with the respective taxation to pay for the discrete set of responsibilities.

"Fundamentally, members of JOBS do not believe that social services (welfare, housing) are appropriately funded from the property tax, and would support a plan to see these costs uploaded. Education is also in this category of 'services to people' rather than to property.

"So, the JOBS alternative to alleviate demonstrated financial pressures on municipalities, is for the Ontario government to take back responsibility for all income redistribution measures, beginning with Ontario Works (implement on a phased basis).

"We ask policy-makers to refrain from settling for city legislation that is no solution, and in fact will surely worsen the city's problems with businesses, jobs and growth exiting to the 905 surrounds.

"All of our associations in JOBS know that at times you may see us as the so-called 'talking heads' so we thought it would be helpful if we provided you with some commentary from the business grassroots." And ensuing this presentation, there was a video presentation that we had an opportunity to observe. These were selected individuals from various sectors of the business community, who expressed their support in principle for the declaration that was made by Judith Andrew—very sound recommendations and very sound advice to the legislators here, so that before we simply proceed, we would give a very sober thought to the implications of unleashing the kinds of powers that this legislation would propose.

I want to make it very clear that what I do believe is that every level of government should be held accountable for its decisions by the electorate. So on the one hand, I am not opposed to providing additional latitude to the municipal level of government to do its work, but what I am opposed to is that those responsibilities are given in a way that contravenes an existing piece of legislation that says, "Let's invite the electorate into this debate, and particularly when it comes to additional taxation, let's allow the taxpayers to have their say."

This government had an option. The option the government had was to introduce the legislation, but to comply with the Taxpayer Protection Act and allow these additional taxation powers to be vetted by the very people who are going to be paying the additional taxes, the additional fees that may well come about as a result of the legislation they're proposing. But they've chosen not to do that. Therein lies our concern on this side. Therein lies my concern. Once again, we have this government saying, "We're going to shut down debate. We don't want to hear that truth. We're going to do it our way. We're going to once again ignore the Taxpayer Protection Act and we'll simply legislate our way out of this box we're in."

They can do it because they have the majority. Everyone in the official opposition will vote against this legislation, but it will be passed because the government of the day has the power. They have the numbers in this place to pass the legislation.

What is important is that taxpayers and voters across the province take note of how this government is doing its business: disregarding a piece of legislation that would have required this government to put this to a referendum and allow every voter in the province to have their say. What are they afraid of? What is the government afraid of? Are they afraid that, by putting it to the required legislated referendum, the people of the province wouldn't support them? If that's the case, then isn't that what the democratic process is all about? It's the voters who have elected every member here, be they Liberal, NDP or Conservative. That those voters have their say—that's what they're afraid of. I believe this government knows full well that if it did go to a referendum, overwhelmingly the people of this province would say, "No, we're taxed enough. All levels of government, live within your means."

For that reason, I will be opposing this bill. We in the official opposition will do what we can to continue debate on this legislation before us, which, by the way, is now a closure motion, of course. We're going to be spending the next three or four days, I suppose, debating a motion the government has brought to shut down debate on the underlying piece of legislation before us, but we feel it's our responsibility to ensure that the people of this province are represented, that their views are represented, and to the best of our abilities we'll be doing that.

Speaker, other members of our caucus will be engaging in the balance of our share of time with the agreement of the House. I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to this bill.

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The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Trinity—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Someone decide.

The member for Erie—Lincoln.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): We're trying to share because I know the third party and my colleague Mr. Marchese feel great regret, as we do, that we need to stand in the Legislature this evening to speak to what they often call the hammer, this time allocation motion which is probably one of the most punitive time allocations that we've seen this session.

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: The members opposite don't like to hear that, but we had all kinds of promises that we wouldn't be seeing these motions before the House. But like your standard Dalton McGuinty promise, it's really not worth the paper it's written on, and therefore we find ourselves once again debating a time allocation motion tonight.

What's particularly regrettable about this time allocation motion is the fact that there had been very little, if

any, debate on this bill before this motion was brought before the assembly. I think there are reasons for that, which I'll discuss momentarily, but if the opposition were using delay tactics or being dilatory in debate, that sort of thing, people might say, "Well, no wonder the government brought in the time allocation motion; the opposition is simply delaying the motion without bringing substance forward." But I don't think any reasonable person would argue that in this particular case. In fact, this bill was only introduced a short while ago; it was introduced—

Mr. O'Toole: November 28.

Mr. Hudak: November 28.

Mr. O'Toole: They're just ramming it through.

Mr. Hudak: And they are ramming it through, I suspect under the cloud of a federal election, because they want to attract as little attention as possible to this latest of major broken promises by Dalton McGuinty.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): You're giving us way too much credit, Tim.

Mr. Hudak: The minister says that they're given too much credit in how sneaky some of the thinking may be, not of the minister but of some of the backroom operators in the Premier's office, in the timing of this legislation.

But just like the new finance minister brought forward his economic statement under the cloud of the Gomery report to hide the fact that the deficit has increased this year despite record revenues coming into the provincial treasury—despite that, the finance minister is going to be running another deficit because they had a major run-away spending problem. The finance minister brought that forward on the day that Judge Gomery came out with his report, which was no surprise. People knew Judge Gomery was coming forward; they knew the approximate time he would come forward. I think they knew the exact date, as a matter of fact. The finance minister chose to do it on that particular date to hide that. I think this legislation and the time allocation motion are before us today because there is a federal election happening, and they want to get this dirty deed done as quickly as possible without much scrutiny from taxpayers.

I think people in the House here know, but just for those watching at home, the motion says, among other things, that "when Bill 37 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may then be immediately called;"—so no third reading debate and very limited second reading debate—"and that, when the order for third reading is called, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and that there shall be no deferral of any vote allowed pursuant to standing order 28(h); and that, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes."

This was filed December 6. The hammer has been brought down on debate.

I think the timing is not coincidental; it's because they want to get this dirty deed done under the cover of the federal election.

Secondly, I think they want to avoid scrutiny. The initial spin that the government put on this legislation I don't think quite met with the facts. It was originally spun out that this will relieve municipalities of the necessity of having a referendum if they were to increase taxes. Well, in fact, that's not what the bill does. The bill allows Dalton McGuinty to break yet another major promise he made. Specifically, when Dalton McGuinty signed the taxpayer protection pledge he basically said that he would not run deficits and would balance the books. We have found that promise to be a false promise, and now we are seeing multi-year, multi-billion dollar deficits. In reality, if the minister had stuck to the financial plan they brought forward in 2004, we would have a surplus this year. But they failed to control spending and, as a result, we are going to run another deficit in the province. Besides that important point, Dalton McGuinty promised he would balance the books, and he will break that promise over and over again. Dalton McGuinty also promised as he looked taxpayers in the eye in the campaign and said, "I will not raise your taxes." Well, that didn't last very long at all. One of the first bills in the Legislative Assembly was the largest tax increase in the history of the province.

Now the third in the one, two, three punch from Dalton McGuinty to the gut of taxpayers is to allow new taxes in Ontario. The Taxpayer Protection Act says that if you're going to have new taxing authority given to a municipality or a conservation authority or what have you, a new type of tax, then there would have to be a referendum on that new tax.

We would have asked Premier Dalton McGuinty to approach this question honestly and to have said from the beginning that these were his plans—not his secret plans, but he was going to have new municipal taxes. If he had said that and won the election, we wouldn't have much to argue about; he would be keeping his promise. But instead, Dalton McGuinty did the opposite—said he would not do these tax increases—when I believe he fully intended to increase taxes substantially.

As my colleague from Oak Ridges said, if the government truly believes that the best approach to the municipal file is to have new municipal taxing authority, then put it out there for a vote. If they're so convinced of their position and that what municipalities want is new taxing authority, put it out there for a referendum, as Dalton promised to do when he signed the taxpayer pledge—but instead of that, breaking promises here and bringing in a closure motion to end debate and to try to end the exposure of Dalton McGuinty's broken promises.

I'm not convinced that this is what the municipalities see as their ideal role. I know there are many municipalities like those in my riding in Lincoln, and next door in Grimsby, Pelham, in fact most of Niagara, that have had their transfers from the province reduced substantially. Despite promises to the contrary, the government has cut their transfers in the annual grants to

municipalities, and particularly hard hit are many of the municipalities in Niagara, including, paradoxically, many of the greenbelt municipalities that now have had their growth frozen and as well, on top of that, are having cuts in the municipal transfers.

So instead of restoring the transfers or contributing to infrastructure projects, for example, to help those municipalities, the government has said, "We're going to allow you to put new taxes on working families or businesses." I feel that the taxes are far too high as it is, particularly with Dalton McGuinty's massive tax increases. I bet you most municipal councillors will feel the same way. Many of them may be forced into raising taxes because of the reduced transfers they've had and the pressure they've had as a result of the decisions and the broken promises of the Dalton McGuinty government.

There have been all kinds of musings about the new Dalton McGuinty taxes, from theatre tickets to alcohol to car registrations to tolls on municipal roads—none of these mentioned by Dalton McGuinty during the campaign. If he had, he would probably have said he would not do them, and now we find out that he did have a secret plan to do so.

Fair enough. If municipalities and taxpayers do want to pay more taxes and do think that there should be additional taxes to take money out of their wallets, then put it to a referendum. But Dalton McGuinty is afraid to do so and is taking the coward's way out by simply passing the buck and increasing taxes through the backdoor by forcing municipalities to do so. That is highly regrettable.

Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of colleagues who also want to address the strong regret that they have in the face of this closure motion and this very damaging bill that is the latest of Dalton McGuinty's big, broken promises. I wish I had a chance to debate the bill more fulsomely, but with regret our debate time has been reduced substantially. I will now take my seat and pass it on to my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

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Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It's a pleasure to join this debate on Bill 37—no; I thought I was going to be debating Bill 37. Apparently that's not what we're debating. We're debating a time allocation motion of the governing party which, while in opposition, absolutely pilloried and criticized in the most vociferous way possible the governing party of the day on that rare occasion that they may have invoked time allocation. So here we are, fast-forward to 2005, but do you know what? They were already bringing in time allocation in 2003. That is interesting, because they talked about respect. The short name of the bill that I thought we'd be debating is the Respect for Municipalities Act.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): Do you like the title?

Mr. Yakabuski: I don't really think much of it at all, I say to my friend from Trinity–Spadina. We're like

brothers, sometimes, in the midst of these debates. I don't much like that name at all. But that is what we thought we'd be talking about. You have to wonder whether there's any respect at all for this Legislature, the chamber or those who occupy it when the government, simply because they don't feel like talking about this bill any more, because they've decided debate is not necessary—after all, “We are Liberals. We know better than anybody. Who could possibly find any kind of deficiency in any act that we would bring forward for debate in this House?” So they have decided that it's totally unnecessary to spend this kind of time debating a particular bill: “We're simply going to tell the House, ‘It's over.’”

Mr. Marchese: Sayonara.

Mr. Yakabuski: “Sayonara. It's done.”

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): Good night.

Mr. Yakabuski: Thank you very much. Good night, Ted. “It's over, good night, finished, no more debate.” Why waste time on such silly things as disagreements or possibly even improving this piece of legislation because of something they may have heard from this side of the House, like my colleague from Oak Ridges, for example, a man of tremendous experience; or my colleague from Erie–Lincoln, a man who has been on both sides of the House? He knows municipalities, he works tremendously well with the municipalities in his riding, and do you know what he knows better now than anybody else—I wouldn't say “better than anybody else,” because I'd like to take some credit myself before I'm done. But what he knows extremely well is people, and he knows about the taxpayer. He's a little concerned, as he should be, about what effect this is going to have on taxpayers.

When I look at my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and talk to my municipal officials, they're not looking for some type of new act to levy all kinds of new taxes and fees and everything else on the backs of their people. What they're asking for is a fairer way of dividing the revenues that are accumulated at all levels of government. This particular government, your government, has decided, “We're not going to divvy anything up. We're not going to sacrifice a thing. Forget about an Ontario-municipal partnership fund that actually addresses the problems of municipalities. No, no, no; we're not going to give you anything more. We're just going to change the law so you can take more money from the same people.”

When you talk to people who have already been dipped into for \$2,000 as a result of Dalton McGuinty's broken promises and the actions of his government and the failure to keep a commitment—we hear that word “commitment” from this government 100 times a day, but they can't keep any kinds of commitments at all. What they're committed to is taking the last red cent the taxpayer has in this province. It's like when lions kill a zebra or a wildebeest, the big ones go in and eat first and then the smaller ones get their share. This government is going to make sure there are a few little morsels left on the bone, a few scraps for the lowest taxpayer levels to

get at. But the people are not going to be fooled. It's all about more and more taxation, and that is not acceptable. The people in the province can't afford any more taxation. What they need is a break.

For example, next Thursday you'll all have the opportunity to support municipalities in this province by standing up on that side of the House and voting in favour of my private member's bill, which will share the gas tax with those rural municipalities that are being hit hardest by your failure to address municipal funding through the Ontario municipal partnership fund. I'm asking you to stand together with me next week to support municipalities in this province by supporting my gas tax bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also have colleagues and I'm going to pass this on to the member from York North.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, we'll pass it on to the next one who stands up. The member from York North.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'm happy to join in the debate this evening. I think one thing that is critical to understand here, in looking at this particular bill, is the fact that it represents this government's turning its back on the promises it made. There is lots of evidence. In fact, it's quite remarkable when I think about the fact that when you make a public statement and a promise there are all kinds of witnesses. There is written evidence. There are all kinds of indicators of this commitment to this particular promise in the way of the Taxpayer Protection Act.

I was looking earlier today at the list of people within the membership of the House who had voted for the Taxpayer Protection Act. Of course, the issue here is the fact that the current government, when in opposition, actually supported this bill. You would think that when you go back on a promise, it would be one you could kind of hide or one where there wasn't much evidence or anything like that. But in fact the opposite is true of the way this government has gone back on its promise that was inherent in the Taxpayer Protection Act.

I think it's important for voters to understand that there was a willingness on the part of this government to make those kinds of promises but with no intention of keeping them. It speaks to the fact that there are two principles that I think are fundamental to the democratic process and the contract, if you like, that you make with the voter. One of those is fairness and the other one is accountability. I would argue that on both counts this government has failed, in looking at this particular piece of legislation, and it has turned its back on the commitment it made through the original Taxpayer Protection Act.

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I say “fairness” because we know there is only one taxpayer, and when you make a promise, you should do your utmost to keep it. I remember that as an elected individual in the election of 1999, one of the reasons that allowed me to run, to seek re-election, was the fact that I could stand before the public and say to them that we had

made certain promises and, in fact, we had kept them. That speaks not only to the integrity of the party itself, but it speaks to the integrity of the individuals, that I am there to say, "This is what we laid out in 1995 and I'm here in 1999 asking you to give me that personal support because we did keep those promises." There's that part of the equation, quite frankly, that is left out of the legislation that we are debating here this evening.

There's also the element of fairness in terms of the commitment to the taxpayer. We all recognize that everyone is a taxpayer. So what government needs to do is balance the commitment—the obligation, if you like—of taxpayers in providing funds and then providing on the other side of that balance sheet the kind of support systems that people need, but also to understand that there's a fundamental respect, that it's not like Santa Claus. You can't just simply offer everything to anybody who comes along and asks for and pressures for support. You have to be able to balance what it is and to what degree can the taxpayer simply afford it. I think that's a really important part of the balancing act and the fairness. Just as within your own family, you have to look at your children sometimes and say, "No, that is not something we can afford," so equally you have to look at those groups within society that may have really good reasons but the purse simply doesn't allow it. I think that the fairness comes into that kind of balancing act.

On the accountability side, people give those they elect a trust. They say, "OK, we will let you take the reins of responsibility for a period of time and we will accept those ideas and those legislative proposals that you have, and here you are. We trust you." That's the essence of accountability.

When you have a government that is then looking at finding ways, frankly through a little bit of smoke and mirrors, to come up with a method that destroys that fundamental sense of accountability by looking at things people would like to do, and they then see that the trust they put in government has been destroyed through this kind of backdoor arrangement by looking at legislation that destroys the credibility of this government, it also speaks to the lack of fairness and it also looks at destroying the accountability.

I think it's an extremely important, although short, piece of legislation. It shows the lack of respect that this government has for taxpayers. That's a very serious charge for this government to have to assume, that they are destroying that lack of respect.

Mr. O'Toole: There's a lot that has been said and there's more that could be said, but unfortunately for those viewing tonight, it's—I'd just set up what has actually happened. Three things happened here. What they've done is time-allocated a bill on a very important matter. What that does is limit debate. You'll see tonight that members are frustrated and there is clearly not enough time. What the time allocation motion does is limit debate on Bill 37. In the dark of night, in a late-night session, they're trying to slide this through, and it's in that vein of treachery that people are cynical about poli-

ticians today. More importantly, this is setting the stage, or setting the table if you will, the tax table, for the City of Toronto Act. The City of Toronto Act is going to give them more taxing authority, so they're going to blame the city. I want to remind members of the background to this. Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government got elected on "Choose change," and here's what he said on September 11, 2003: "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise that I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without explicit consent of the voters. Rather, I promise to abide by the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act."

Clearly, this bill skates around—there are other words you could use: obfuscate, circumvent, get around it, whatever—and tries to put this small Bill 37—the essence of it is one paragraph, one actual section that says, "A referendum is not required for the purposes of subsection 3(1) with respect to a bill that gives a municipality the authority to levy a new tax."

I want to commend what was said by the member from York region, Frank Klees. He spoke earlier, and the member from York North spoke as well, and put on the comment here that Hazel McCallion said. I have a lot of respect for her. She said, "As I say, I don't believe that we should be given any additional taxing power. It's going to backfire on us, because if the province gives us more taxing powers, it will take much longer to get rid of social costs, health and education from the property tax, because they'll say, 'Look, you have taxing power now, so why should we take social costs?'" Hazel McCallion said that on Goldhawk on November 22, 2005. Hazel gets it, Dalton gets it, and the minister, Mr. Gerretsen, gets it. He knows this is downloading.

What troubles me, and it troubles all the members here tonight—the member for Erie–Lincoln mentioned it most passionately—is the method by which they're doing this. The taxpayers—there's a federal election, it's the darkness of night. It's the management of this issue that leads to the cynicism of Ontario. They've got this whole democratic renewal debate going on. All they have to do is look in the mirror. They've stymied debate on a very passionate issue. The member from Trinity–Spadina is going to bring a real stomach of fire to this thing. I'm waiting. In fact, I'm going to wait.

I'm disappointed that this government, that promised not to time-allocate bills, promised not to raise taxes—they're doing all of it. Get prepared for more.

Mr. Marchese: I want to welcome the citizens of Ontario watching this political forum. We're on live, it's 8:48 and we're discussing Bill 37—

Interjection: It's 7:48.

Mr. Marchese: What did I say? It's 7:48. It's so wonderful that the Liberals are paying attention. You noticed. I like that, because that means we're interacting, it's an interactive kind of place.

First, on the time allocation motion, I want to say that what the Liberals are doing here tonight isn't anything new. This is true. Second, I want to also add that when Mr. Bradley, who is here tonight, was in the opposition

benches as a Liberal opposition member, he used to rail against strangulation motions, because that's what closure motions are: they strangle debate. Jimmy would get a bit upset, as I would, against strangulation motions—and for good reasons, I must admit.

Here's the problem around these issues: New Democrats introduced closure motions, the Tories introduced closure motions, the Liberals are introducing closure motions. It's nothing new. You've got my friend the Minister for Public Infrastructure Renewal standing up saying, "Ah, but when the Tories were in power they introduced so many closure motions"—I forgot if he mentioned the NDP; it was probably long ago; he probably did—"and we, the Liberals, are introducing far fewer." It's such a silly debate, I've got to tell you. We look silly when we do that.

Interjection.

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Mr. Marchese: It's good to see you, David. Do come back and try to participate in the debate. But in the meantime, it was nice for you to come to say hello.

On the whole motion of strangulation motions, please, stop the nonsense. "We introduced fewer than you did, and we're better than you are, and we are spending more"—that nonsense, you get sick of it. Everyone gets sick of it, especially Rosario Marchese. I'm getting so tired of listening to it. Why don't you just stand up and say—

Interjections.

Mr. Marchese: Going federal doesn't change a thing. We have the same debates on closure motions. So it doesn't really matter where you go, the debate is the same.

You find Liberals are making fun of this, as if somehow it's humorous. What I'm trying to say to you—

Interjections.

Mr. Marchese: Are you serious? Are you really? OK, if you are, I'm looking forward to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, the following time he moves a motion, not to commit the same error and say, "We did less," or "We did more than you." Just say, "Look, it's a closure motion," and move on, right? It would make me less cynical and the public would be less cynical—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: I'm trying to hear Rick Bartolucci, the Minister of Northern Development. I can't hear him very well. Please sit closer so I can hear you. Make yourself at home on this side. Wherever you want to sit; it's not a big deal.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): I'm going. I've been here enough.

Mr. Marchese: I want to hear you clearly so I can respond to it, because it's an interactive place. I hope the Speaker doesn't mind too much, as long as we're speaking through the Speaker.

Enough of the strangulation motion, because it's the duty and power and obligation of government to do whatever it feels is correct. We debate them, we disagree with

it, but I prefer to debate the merits of the bill than to get stuck in the procedural motion of the bill. So I hope you'll stop the nonsense. Make me feel better and make the citizens who are following these debates feel a little bit better as well.

Primero, it is my job tonight, and my pleasure, to beat you up, you Liberals, as best I can. I want to beat up on Liberals primarily, but I will also take the opportunity to beat up on Tories, because it's a pleasure to do that as well. While it is true that, while in opposition, we in concert attack the government, there are disagreements, as the citizens of Ontario might imagine, between the two of us. I want to make that clear by elaborating on the matter as best I can.

First of all, the Tories downloaded a whole lot of things that they'd rather not talk about.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: David, while it is true that the Liberals uploaded—in other words, took responsibility for the financing of education by half, because, remember, 25% to 30% of the education portion is still on the property tax that property owners, businesses and tenants are paying. So while it is true that the Conservatives assumed the cost of half of the property taxes for education, they downloaded what they used to argue was an equal number of services to the city of Toronto.

I often wonder, what was the point of that exercise? Why upload something and download an equal number of responsibilities to the city? I could never quite understand it, and it was never made any clearer to me, or by any Tory arguing this, that somehow it made any sense. But I think the logic of what they tried to do was this: They tried to make it appear that seniors were benefiting by the education uploading and that citizens, especially seniors, were being spared the cost of education as tenants or as homeowners or, indeed, if they were still business owners. But it must not have taken too much time for people to realize that there was no net gain.

Not only did cities have to assume greater costs for that which was downloaded to all the cities across Ontario as their responsibility, I remind those of you who are paying attention—or not—or who watch from time to time but who missed these debates that the Tories downloaded all public housing to the municipality, and then the municipality of Toronto decided they would have an independent Toronto Community Housing Corp. to run the housing. But they downloaded all of the housing responsibilities to the local level.

By the way, for those of you who are paying attention, Liberals and others, downloading the cost means that the taxpayer—meaning the homeowner and tenants and city and business people—are paying for all of the public housing that is in the province of Ontario, and more than 40% of our public housing is in the city of Toronto, so the city of Toronto picks up the biggest cost of housing.

Understand this, because the Tories don't understand it very well—oh, I shouldn't say that. They did. It was the slyness and the perfect political judgment they made

to pass it on, because when you pass on the cost of housing and it comes out of property taxes, the cities have to take responsibility for this, no longer the province. If the city doesn't take care of the buildings, the province said, "Not our problem."

By the way, I remind you that there are only two jurisdictions in the world that assume the cost municipally—two jurisdictions in the world. So imagine how clever the provincial Conservative government was when they downloaded housing to municipalities. In Canada, only Ontario passes on the cost for public housing to the municipalities. It's not brilliant. It was a disaster, because it comes out of property taxes, not income tax. Property tax is mostly tenants and businesses. It just is not right, and it's not right because it's not based on the ability to pay. The fact that you might have a home doesn't mean you're millionaires. There are lots of people who have homes who worked all their life simply to own a home, but it doesn't mean they're rich people. They're richer than some tenants overall, but it doesn't mean they're wealthy.

They also downloaded ambulances and much of the transportation to the municipalities, and in the end, the municipalities said that swap was not even, that there was something imbalanced about it. There was nothing revenue-neutral about it. Cities took more of the costs in lieu of lifting up half of the education taxes. Obviously, cities were quite upset by this and have been crying legitimately for years, but no one ever fixed it. The Tories had no inclination to fix it. You heard the logic from many of the Tories who spoke tonight: "They should contain their costs." The beauty of what the Conservatives did was that they downloaded these responsibilities and forced the cities to make the cuts—not the province, but the cities. They were left holding the bag, as it were.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): The proverbial bag.

Mr. Marchese: The proverbial bag. Whatever bag you want to hold. It's that bag.

So the cities are stuck, and many of them were broke. I've tried to explain downloading as clearly as I could, because most people simply see downloading as a concept rather than seeing the practical elements of how it is that you pass on costs to the property taxpayer and to the tenants and the businesses in those municipalities.

It was profoundly wrong as a strategy, politically right for the Tories because it forces municipalities to make cuts, but wrong in terms of overall services. OK.

Now we have the Liberals coming up with a bill which they call the Respect for Municipalities Act. I was reminded yesterday by the Minister of Health Promotion that there are many former mayors who are Liberal MPPs, many—he enumerated a whole number of them; I can't name you all, because there are so many of you—and city councillors. Many of you were city councillors, including the Minister of Culture, who put up her hand to indicate. I am led to believe by the Minister of Health Promotion that this bill was crafted by the great brain

trust contained in the Liberal membership of former mayors and city councillors. God bless. It took literally—how many former mayors do you have in your caucus?

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Hon. Mr. Colle: Eighteen.

Mr. Marchese: Eighteen? How many city councillors?

Hon. Mr. Colle: Fifty-two.

Mr. Marchese: I suspect all of you were former city councillors: 52—quite right. Let's just say for the sake of it, as Mr. Colle, the Minister of Citizenship, says, that there are 18 mayors and the rest were city councillors. It took the brilliance of this wonderful brain trust to craft this bill. As you will notice, citizens of Ontario, this bill is very short. It must have taken 18 mayors, including the Minister of Municipal Affairs, a lot of hours of talking and consulting to come up with this brilliant strategy. Without the consultation the Minister of Municipal Affairs must have had with all of these mayors, to be fair, I think he might not have been able, on his own, to have crafted this great bill. I am doing this to give credit to all these brilliant former mayors and city councillors who are now MPPs, who, when I debated a couple of days ago and tonight—they're very proud of this bill. Mr. Speaker, your colleagues are very proud of this bill. They make no bones about it. They call it the Respect for Municipalities Act.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Marchese: Yes. And the Minister of Municipal Affairs is enthused and proud and very eager to bring it out. Notwithstanding this strangulation motion, I am convinced that he would have been more than happy to have taken this out for debate, or will be very keen to take it out for debate. Is that the case? I would think that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, as a man who is proud of his own bill, would be so pleased to take it out of here and consult the other mayors here in the city of Toronto and in Kingston, where he's from, and Ottawa. All the ministers and others are so pleased with the bill that, notwithstanding the strangulation motion, they might find a way to make sure that people will be able to comment on this bill. I'm being ironic. I'm just making fun. Clearly they're not interested in that. Sometimes you hope people are able to see through the irony, but sometimes it isn't as clear as one would hope.

Now, here is what the brilliance of the brain trust came up with. Maybe before I get there, just as a reminder, the Taxpayer Protection Act—I don't want to peeve you, Speaker; you might get peeved. But you notice that the Premier was there smiling, and Minister Broten was behind him smiling, and former Speaker Alvin Curling was there, pensive—not smiling, but pensive—and George Smitherman, the Minister of Health was there, not smiling, but pensive.

Hon. Mr. Colle: The former Speaker is now smiling.

Mr. Marchese: The former Speaker is smiling even more now that he's gone; you're quite right.

Mr. Yakabuski: He doesn't have to do anything in the cold of winter.

Mr. Marchese: Not much, not today. With all due respect, I am happy he is there.

But Dalton was there, with his smiling face, eagerly signing the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Mr. Yakubuski: I think you'd make a great ambassador to Portugal.

Mr. Marchese: No, Italy.

I wonder whether he had any doubts, because as I look at George Smitherman, the Minister of Health, in this picture he is not smiling. I think he must be nervous, he must be worried. He's saying "Hmm, I don't know if this is a good idea." But Minister of the Environment Broten was cheerleading and smiling; she was new at it, so I suspect she didn't quite know what she was getting into at the time. But Dalton McGuinty ought to have known, because the Taxpayer Protection Act says no taxes and no deficits, that he was committing himself to no increases in taxes whatsoever, and should he be so inclined, he would have to consult the taxpayers out there.

Hon. Mr. Colle: What about the Speaker?

Mr. Marchese: No, I'm more interested in McGuinty. He's a nice guy, generally speaking. I don't criticize him as a person; I criticize him for political judgment, because it was a serious mistake.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: I will remind you, Minister of Culture, that Gerry Phillips, now the minister of Management Board, was more than clairvoyant. I wouldn't say he was omnipotent, but he was—

Interjection: Omniscient.

Mr. Marchese: Omniscient. Good doctor, you were here with me a while ago, and you anticipated the word, didn't you? Yes. Gerry, with his great mind, was able—because you remember that he was a great finance guy. He used to carry all these books with him. He would mark the books up, go up with them and get ready for the meeting to show how smart he was on finances. You remember that, right?

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: You're quite right, he is. I don't detract at all from that. All I want to say is that your denials of, "Oh, woe, we were deceived by the Tories about the deficit. Oh, woe, we just didn't know"—that kind of pleading of ignorance doesn't suit you, doesn't become you well, especially the experienced ones. The new ones can take refuge from this, because they didn't know. The member from Don Valley West can indeed say, "We didn't know," and it's true, although she's an otherwise intelligent person who might have been able to understand that Gerry Phillips was very, very clear on this. Quite apart from that, Gerry said, "We've got"—

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Two billion.

Mr. Marchese: No, no.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I was here when he said it.

Mr. Marchese: No, no. Minister, you cannot rewrite history. Gerry said, "We have a \$5-billion risk." Gerry, the Minister of Government Services, I tell you, had a great ability to discern, to muddle through the numbers.

He was good, and he knew there was a \$5-billion "risk," otherwise known as a deficit. So you would have thought McGuinty would say, "Gerry, the Minister of Government Services, is on to something. We'd better listen." But no, he went there and signed—smiling—the Taxpayer Protection Act, no problemo. No deficits, no increase in taxes, and if you should be so inclined, you'd have to go and face the music with the taxpayers. He got elected and then he whacked people with the health tax, the health premium. All those poor people earning \$35,000 or \$40,000 got whacked with paying \$350 and all those millionaires got whacked with \$900. Poor millionaires, I feel so sorry for them. They wanted to pay more, but they couldn't because the Liberal Party put a limit on how much millionaires could pay. He determined that for those who were rich we had to put a cap, because the poor millionaires couldn't pay one single penny more. We had no problem whacking those who earn 35,000 bucks with \$350, but no, for the poor millionaires, those who made over \$100,000, it's just a max of \$900. What a wonderful, progressive tax you Liberals introduced—and you're proud, God bless you.

I've talked about the Taxpayer Protection Act. It's clear, from what many Tories have said, that the Liberals simply couldn't abide by it; they never could. It was dumb politics at the time. It has taken them at least two years to recover from those dumb politics. In their minds they think, "Hopefully, we're beyond that. We have moved over that trajectory, and we're now on ground where we can hopefully make gains and be loved again." I don't know, but that's what I know Liberals think and believe—or hope. Liberals have to pray that the electorate, otherwise known as good citizens, will forget when the election time comes. My suspicion is that they won't. Some will forgive you, but most won't. I can only wish that that is the case.

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I've talked about the Taxpayer Protection Act. I've talked about downloading. The response of the Liberal Party to downloading is the Respect for Municipalities Act.

What does the Respect for Municipalities Act do? I remind the citizens watching that whenever anyone names bills as strangely or as deliciously contradictory as that, there's something wrong with the bill. We witnessed this through the Tories, and we're seeing with the Liberals that they're just repeating the same pattern. They assume that you good citizens are not very bright, because if they assumed differently, the bill would be named differently. While you call it Respect for Municipalities, it is anything but, and I want to prove to you why.

The bill simply allows cities to tax. They could tax alcohol, they could tax cigarettes, they could tax entertainment activities or venues. They could tax literally anything that is taxable or is moving, if you know what I mean. It is a user fee. It is a downloading of responsibility. It is a downloading of a tax that Liberals are afraid to assume themselves. It is a bill that is designed,

at Christmastime, to say to the municipalities, "Here it is, boys. You can tax to your heart's content. Don't you worry about us: You go get 'em and raise the money you need, and we are not going to bother you with that." It's beautiful. Doesn't it remind you a bit about the down-loading that the Tories introduced?

Mr. Levac: Oh, no.

Mr. Marchese: Oh, yes. Let me explain.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): We're empowering.

Mr. Marchese: I beg your pardon, Don Valley West? Who's empowering?

Ms. Wynne: We're empowering.

Mr. Marchese: Ah. I want to speak to the comments of the member from Don Valley West. She's proud of this bill. I could see it through her gesturing. "We're empowering." That's like saying, "Yeah, man. This is cool, really cool. We're empowering the cities."

Interjection: Rise above the cheap politics.

Mr. Marchese: But it's really fun. Look, you can do the same. I don't mind if you do the same. I really don't.

I'm disagreeing, with as much humour and seriousness as I can, when members opposite say they are empowering cities. It is an enabling bill, yes. Member from Don Valley West, we understand. But the problem with this tax power is, if they can empower the cities to tax, why can't the province do it themselves? I wonder if the member from Don Valley West has an answer. Any answer?

Ms. Wynne: Because the municipalities are responsible.

Mr. Marchese: The member from Don Valley West says because they're cities and it's their responsibility to do what they want, basically.

The problemo is this: 80% of the people live in cities. Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats know this. Most of the municipalities are broke. City of Toronto politicians know this. AMO says that all of Ontario's cities and towns are in the red. They owe, in total, three billion bucks. That means they are having financial difficulty. The response of the Liberal government, the cheerful response and the proud response, is, "Well, we're going to allow them to tax." They know, because they're politicians, that when you give the city of Toronto, or any little town—Wawa or wherever you are—the power to tax entertainment venues or alcohol or cigarettes or anything else, maybe barbers who do haircuts, whatever you can think of, they're not going to like it. They're going to scream and they're going to be mad as hell. The province is going to say, "Not our problemo. We gave the cities the power to tax, and if they do and the good citizens of those cities get angry, it's not our problem."

It's as simple as that, and the Liberal members know this. It's like throwing a bomb, like picking up a bomb and throwing it on the other side. The Liberals are saying, "That's what they want. We are empowering them. We are giving them the responsibility to tax."

If the city of Toronto were to tax, it is estimated that they might bring in 50 million bucks. They're in the hole

by \$500 million: \$200 million in operating expenses and \$300 million in capital. That's a big, big, big problem. Even if they have the fortitude to do this, they can't raise enough money to deal with their own deficit.

The Minister of Health Promotion yesterday said, "At least the Liberals have the fortitude"—he calls it fortitude—"to introduce this bill." How can you say that giving the municipalities the power to tax has to do with intestinal fortitude on your part? How can it be fortitude? If all you're doing is sending the responsibility to somebody else, how could you declare yourself to be strong and bold and leaders? All you're doing is saying to the city, "Go get 'em, boys. Go tax to your heart's content." And all of you 18 mayors, assuming that is correct, and the rest of the 52-odd city councillors that you are know that it's simply impossible to do and get away with. You all know that.

So tonight there were a number of people who came. I was a bit surprised by the group. They are called the JOBS Coalition. The member from Oak Ridges mentioned a list of people: the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, chamber of commerce types; the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, friends of yours, dare I say?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I want you to quote them.

Mr. Marchese: I will; I've got their quotes. I'm going to get there, David, don't you worry.

They're all friends of Liberals and Tories, generally speaking. Most of them are not friends of New Democrats, to be frank and fair. This is what some of them said. Steve Parish—

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I know Steve Parish—a good man, a very good man.

Mr. Marchese: He's the mayor of the city of Ajax. The member from Oakville says he's a good man.

Here's the quote: "I can remember a few years ago when municipal mayors all wanted to get education off the property tax and we sort of half succeeded. We got half of it off the property and inherited a great whack of social costs and got ourselves in more trouble than we were in." He is absolutely right. I spoke to that. That's why I attacked with eagerness the Conservative government that did this before. I suspect Steve Parish, mayor of the city of Ajax, is looking for relief, and the relief I suspect he is looking for is uploading of responsibilities, not downloading.

Mr. McMeekin: If we do that and raise taxes, will you stand up and accuse us of having broken another promise?

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Mr. Marchese: No, no. Look, when you increased taxes, it's true that you broke your promises. Our attack on your health tax was that it was unfair in terms of who you went after. While it's true that we attacked you for breaking your promise, we would not have attacked you had you made it progressive. What you did was not progressive.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Ted, please, let me go on. I've got more things.

I suspect the mayor from Ajax was looking for Liberal-friendly types, who were former mayors and are now Liberal MPPs, to lift the burden and pick up some of those social costs that are picked up by the cities across Ontario. They don't see it in this bill.

Let me go on so the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal is able to see that I am fair in this regard. Hazel McCallion, a friend to Liberals and Tories on any given day, says: "As I say, I don't believe that we should be given extra taxing powers. It's going to backfire on us, because if the province gives us more taxing powers it will take much longer to get rid of social costs, health and education off the property tax. Because they'll say, 'Look, you have taxing powers now, so why should we take social costs off your property tax?' You can't have it both ways," she declares. An interesting quote.

It all connects in one way or the other in terms of the arguments we are making on this side. Municipal councillors and mayors are saying this is not the way to go. We have people like David Crombie, who says: "When the Harris government downloaded social services and social housing, I said at the time that it was wrong in principle and disastrous in practice. It is still the case, and it would be a responsible action for the current government to upload both these services to restore the balance." David Crombie, former minister of the Conservative Party federally, former mayor of the city of Toronto, says that what the Tories did provincially was wrong and disastrous and that it would be the responsible thing for provincial governments to upload responsibility for certain things. I'll refer to them so you're aware of them.

Public health in Toronto—I'll just give figures from the city of Toronto because I know it a little bit better—is \$266 million, ambulance is \$312 million, social assistance is \$1.33 billion, seniors services are \$242 million, child care is \$193 million, and social housing is \$879 million. That's the city of Toronto alone.

Do you see how bad this is? We are asking taxpayers to pick up costs that have nothing to do with servicing a home or an apartment or a business—nothing at all. Here in the city of Toronto we're talking billions of dollars for things that have nothing to do with servicing a home. David Crombie correctly says we need to lift the costs up. Marchese's been saying it for quite some time.

I am amazed that this argument is picking up at this time, but I am happy that it is coming at this time. We're talking about people who are well respected in their communities. We're talking about mayors who have a great deal of support in their communities. We're talking about people who ought to know, and they do. These people I'm quoting are going to be very, very difficult to simply fend off. It's so easy to fend off New Democrats. You can say, "Ah, a small party, nobody listens to them." And it's easy to dismiss the Tories, for good reasons on other grounds, because they caused bigger problems than we ever dreamed of. But it's hard to dismiss good old Hazel, hard to dismiss Steve Parish, hard to dismiss David Crombie—well-respected individuals.

Here we've got Ottawa. Ottawa says the following, the city of Ottawa task force on property assessment: "The task force concluded that property taxes were appropriate to fund property-related services such as roads, police, fire protection etc. ... but were inappropriate to fund such broad social/income-redistributive programs such as welfare assistance, ... social housing ... etc.—programs that the principles of fairness indicate are better funded from ability-to-pay tax revenues."

The Minister of Culture would be wise to pay attention to it, I would think. She doesn't have to if she doesn't want to, but—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: The task force, quite right. But let's see what the Ottawa city council endorsed, Minister of Culture, because you're quite right. Let's see what they have to say. "The task force recommends to the province of Ontario that property taxes should not form the basis of funding such income-redistributive social programs as education, welfare assistance, child care subsidies, social housing, and public health; these programs should be funded from ability-to-pay tax revenues."

These are your colleagues still—many are still your colleagues, I presume. They're saying to you, Minister of Culture, that what you are doing with this bill is wrong and they're asking you to assume the costs.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): They want to have more power to tax.

Mr. Marchese: I'm sorry? They want more power to tax? They haven't said—

Hon. Mr. Colle: Give her the floor.

Mr. Marchese: Let her speak.

Interjection: Share your time with her.

Mr. Marchese: No, she's got plenty of time; you guys have lots of time. I hope you use some of the time, because you have approximately another 40 minutes or so.

I have no quote from the city of Ottawa mayor and councillors that says, "Please, we want the power to tax." If the Minister of Culture has any knowledge of such a motion or idea, please send it off, and Mike Colle, Minister of Citizenship, if the city of Toronto wants taxing powers, please let me know.

Let me see if I can find David Miller's quote. Here's what David Miller says: "We also need the provincial government to pay for social services. They do everywhere else. It's a big dent in our budget and it's a big dent in the budgets of the regions around Toronto and many other Ontario cities."

Hon. Mr. Colle: Plus he wants taxing power.

Mr. Marchese: Let me explain. I have no knowledge—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I think we should get back to the speaker who has the floor.

Mr. Marchese: I have no knowledge of David Miller saying, "Please give me taxing powers."

Here's what I suspect the majority of city councillors would like: take responsibility for housing; take responsibility for public health; take responsibility for ambulances; take responsibility for social assistance, \$1.3 billion; take responsibility for seniors services, \$242 million; take responsibility for child care, \$193 million; take responsibility for social housing, \$879 million.

Here's what I propose to you: You take up \$1 billion of social assistance or social housing, and then, I dare say, the city of Toronto would accept you giving them taxing powers, because they would never use them. They would never use them, because to use them is to get clobbered, and Minister of Citizenship, you know that. You know that your constituents are going bananas, going crazy trying to get a meeting with you to talk about the assessments and trying to get a meeting to talk to you about how property taxes are hurting them, how they're unable to pay both the assessment increases and the regular tax increases. I am convinced you don't know what to tell them, because you guys are—

Hon. Mr. Colle: In 1990, you said you were going to defeat it.

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Mr. Marchese: We defeated it. Remember? We defeated any move to introduce the current value assessment, and now you are stuck. What did the province do? A year ago, the province, with Mr. Sorbara, the former Minister of Finance, was going to review the assessment office. Speaker, you might know about this. He was going to review the whole assessment system. A year later, he's gone, and then it comes back and what do we have? Two proposals: (1) They changed the appeal time from one month to another, and (2) they now—

Hon. Mr. Colle: No, six months.

Mr. Marchese: Big deal. They're going to get clobbered. Whether it's six months from now or later, it doesn't matter. Second, in order to appeal your property tax assessment, you've got to pay 75 bucks. We're talking about seniors who count their pennies. The Minister of Citizenship knows this as much as I do, and maybe the Minister of Culture: Seniors count their pennies. Every time there's a gas increase, a hydro increase, a property tax increase, they come to your office and they come to mine saying, "We can't afford it. What are you people doing?" You know that. All they could do by way of changes to the Assessment Act was to increase the appeal dollars that it takes to get a review of your tax assessment. It's 75 bucks. What senior citizen has 75 bucks to appeal their taxes? Maybe in Oakville they've got money. I don't know. But I know that the senior citizens of—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We've had an interesting evening, but I would like to conclude it by hearing the member who has the floor, the member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Marchese: Maybe some of your constituents are wealthy. God bless them. That's not a problemo. But a whole lot of senior citizens in the riding of the Minister of Citizenship can't afford it.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Speaker: The member is stroking me.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm going to have to look that one up. In the meantime, Mr. Marchese, please take the floor and take it at your place.

Mr. Marchese: I don't want to be accused of harassment here. This is not stroking. Please.

I know the senior citizens of Mr. Ruprecht's riding of Parkdale are not happy about this. All these assessment changes you made mean nothing. Here's what it means: Most senior citizens are going to think twice before they appeal—the province loves that—and then the province says, "Now that we don't need all these assessment workers, we can just send them out. 'Go back home, boys. We don't need you any more.'" That is the effect of the change. Michael, you don't see that, eh? But think about it.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Think about all the senior citizens in all of your ridings. Think about it, and then you go tell them, "Hey, not a problem. There's a clause called reconsideration." They're going to get whacked, Michael.

Here you've got Crombie and Miller and everybody saying—

Hon. Mr. Colle: Miller wants more taxes.

Mr. Marchese: No, no, no. They don't want to tax. No sir. They want your provincial income tax money.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I feel a little left out. I'm also not able to hear. Mr. Marchese?

Mr. Marchese: I don't see the city of Toronto saying, "Give me the taxing power, because I want to tax citizens to death." I don't see that, I don't hear that, only Liberal former city councillors, Liberal former mayors saying, "Oh, they want to be empowered. They want the taxing power so they can get whacked around by the citizens of every city across this province."

Here's what they want. The Toronto Community Housing Corp. would love for the province to give them some money, because they need 225 million bucks to fix their buildings. They are not getting one cent—not one cent. There is no pecunia for Toronto Community Housing, no pecunia. Here's what I say: It's not just a matter of money, as if somehow the issue of money is abstract.

Interjections.

Laughter.

Mr. Marchese: Minister of Natural Resources, I'm glad to see you're amusing yourself. It's so good to see you—a former New Democrat. Everybody loves a rat, I've got to tell you.

Two hundred and twenty-five million dollars would fix a lot of dilapidated buildings. It would fix the squalor that so many poor people live in. As the Liberals enjoy themselves with this new taxing power they're giving the cities, just think about those poor kids that many of you have in the city of Toronto who are living in squalor because they don't have the money from the province, and they certainly don't have it from the city of Toronto. Even where there's taxing power, they could never raise

enough money to fix their buildings, nor would that necessarily be their first priority when they have so many needs.

They're looking to the provincial government to give them some money to fix their buildings so poor kids and poor families can feel good to live in an affordable, quality home that you can be proud of, that you don't want to run away from every day, that you can be proud enough to focus on your education instead of thinking, "We're living in squalor and we've got to get out of here no matter what."

As you gleefully enjoy the power of the bill, the fortitude you have to pass this on to the cities, just think about your obligation, or lack of, and your responsibility, or lack of, to take care of kids and families who are in desperate need.

I should remind you that in France, one of the few buildings—you look quizzical. You say, "What does France have to do with it?" But in relation to this, one of the few public housing buildings that did not cause any riots or violence was the building that had been upgraded and fixed up and linked to the rest of the community to the extent that they felt good living there. It was evidence that if you fix the buildings up, you do good, you feel good and you have hope to do other things. And that's just one minor thing.

It's a responsibility of government to fund these things through provincial income taxes, not to say to the cities, "Here's a taxing bill so you can go get beaten up by the citizens when you tax alcohol or haircuts or entertainment venues or whatever it is." Sorry, it's not going to work. Most municipalities will not use it, because they know they will be hurt if they do it. Even Toronto won't do it except in some cases, and even then it's not enough to deal with the \$500-million deficit they've got.

This bill is bad. This bill is wrong. Marchese will vote against it and New Democrats will vote against it because it's the wrong bill to introduce in this place.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Caplan has moved government notice of motion 51. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2038 to 2040.

The Deputy Speaker: Everyone take their seats, please. All in favour please stand one at a time and be recognized by the clerk.

Ayes

Balkissoon, Bas	Leal, Jeff	Ramsay, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Levac, Dave	Rinaldi, Lou
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Brownell, Jim	McMeekin, Ted	Wilkinson, John
Caplan, David	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Colle, Mike	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Patten, Richard	
Fonseca, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq	

The Deputy Speaker: All those against, please rise.

Nays

Hardeman, Ernie	Klees, Frank	O'Toole, John
Hudak, Tim	Marchese, Rosario	Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 22; the nays are 6.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Caplan has moved adjournment of the House—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I can stay here until 9:30. I have nothing to do.

Mr. Caplan has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House is adjourned until 10 of the clock on December 8.

The House adjourned at 2043.

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Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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